

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A vehicle information providing apparatus comprising:

information acquisition function for accessing a  
5 storage device and acquiring information associated  
with progress status of a plurality of vehicles before  
shipping, which information is stored in the storage  
device; and

information providing function for, via said  
10 information acquisition function to refer to the  
storage device by using an identification information  
as a key, acquiring information associated with  
progress status of a specific vehicle corresponding to  
the identification information, the identification  
15 information which is acquired from an information  
terminal that is connected via a communication line to  
allow two-way communications and specifies a user of  
the information terminal or a vehicle, and for  
providing the acquired information to the information  
20 terminal from which the identification information was  
output.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the  
information associated with progress status of the  
vehicle contains an image that represents situations in  
25 a plurality of stages until the specific vehicle is  
shipped.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the information associated with progress status of the vehicle contains a photographed image of the specific vehicle under assembly in an assembly line of a vehicle  
5 manufacturer.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the information associated with progress status of the vehicle contains an image or coordinate position information which indicates a transportation route  
10 and/or a current position upon transportation of the specific vehicle which has undergone assembly in a vehicle manufacturer.

5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said information providing function provides the information  
15 associated with progress status of the vehicle to the information terminal, from which the identification information was output, in response to acquisition of the identification information or at a predetermined timing.

20 6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the information associated with progress status of the vehicle contains a scheduled assembly time of the specific vehicle in an assembly line of a vehicle manufacturer, and

25 said information providing function informs a user, who waits for delivery of the specific vehicle, of the scheduled assembly time of the specific vehicle

prior to that scheduled assembly time, and provides a  
photographed image of the specific vehicle under  
assembly in the assembly line to the information  
terminal from which the identification information was  
5 output when the scheduled assembly time has been  
reached.

7. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein, when  
said information acquisition function recognizes that  
the information associated with progress status of the  
10 plurality of vehicles, which information is stored in  
the storage device, has been updated by information  
associated with a change in shipping date, said  
information providing function specifies a specific  
vehicle, the shipping date of which has been changed,  
15 in accordance with the identification information, and  
informs an information terminal specified by the  
identification information of the change in shipping  
date of the specific vehicle.

8. The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said  
20 information providing function informs the information  
terminal of the user of the change in shipping date via  
an e-mail message to that information terminal.

9. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said  
information providing function provides information to  
25 only a user who has acquired the identification  
information to estimate or order the specific vehicle  
via the communication line.

10. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the communication line includes an Internet, and

said information providing function provides information associated with progress status of the specific vehicle to the information terminal as a data file of a Web page described in a predetermined data format.

11. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the information associated with progress status of the vehicle, which is acquired by said information acquisition function contains photographed images of at least all vehicles which are under assembly in the assembly line of the vehicle manufacturer and are customizable as the specific vehicle.

12. The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said information acquisition function composites a name of a purchaser of the specific vehicle to the photographed image.

13. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein when the information which contains an image of the specific vehicle and is associated with progress status of the vehicle is provided as a pay service to a purchaser of the specific vehicle, production of the specific vehicle starts after a purchaser has subscribed to the pay service.

14. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the information associated with the progress status of the

vehicle contains time information upon completion of assembly of the specific vehicle in the assembly line of the vehicle manufacturer.

15. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the  
5 information which contains an image of the specific vehicle and is associated with progress status of the vehicle contains names and/or photos of operators who participate in a plurality of stages until the specific vehicle is shipped.

10 16. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising assembly schedule adjustment function for, when the specific vehicle is assembled in an assembly line of a vehicle manufacturer, adjusting a schedule of the assembly line or requesting an external device that  
15 manages the assembly line to adjust a schedule, so as to allow the user to participate in a predetermined assembly process, and

wherein said information providing function informs the user of a schedule that allows the user to  
20 participate in the predetermined assembly process as the adjustment result by said schedule adjustment function.

17. The apparatus according to claim 16, wherein, when said schedule adjustment function has adjusted the  
25 schedule, said information providing function provides a man-machine interface, which allows the user to make the predetermined assembly process by remote control

while observing a display image obtained by photographing a state of the assembly process, to the information terminal connected via the communication line to allow two-way communications.

5 18. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein, when a special situation falling outside a plurality of predetermined stages until the specific vehicle is shipped has occurred, said information providing function provides information associated with the special situation to the information terminal.

10 19. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said information providing function provides gathering situation of components required to build the specific vehicle to a vehicle manufacturer with the user being able to recognize the gathering status on a map displayed on the information terminal in nearly real time.

15 20. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein a plurality of photographing devices are arranged in the assembly line of the vehicle manufacturer to photograph a vehicle in a plurality of stages in assembly, and

20 said information providing function provides a man-machine interface which can select a desired one of the plurality of photographing devices to the information terminal of a purchaser of the specific vehicle, which is connected via the communication line to allow two-way communications.

21. The apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the man-machine interface can adjust a photographing state of the selected photographing device by remote control from the information terminal.

5 22. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the information which contains an image of the specific vehicle and is associated with progress status of the vehicle contains names and/or photos of operators who participate in a plurality of stages until the specific  
10 vehicle is shipped.

23. A vehicle information providing apparatus comprising:

information acquisition means for accessing a storage device and acquiring information associated  
15 with progress status of a plurality of vehicles before shipping, which information is stored in the storage device; and

information providing means for controlling said information acquisition means to refer to the storage  
20 device using, as a key, identification information which is acquired from an information terminal that is connected via a communication line to allow two-way communications, and specifies a user of the information terminal or a vehicle so as to acquire information  
25 associated with progress status of a specific vehicle corresponding to the identification information, and for providing the acquired information to the

information terminal from which the identification information was output.

24. A vehicle information providing system which comprises an information providing apparatus that  
5 belongs to a vehicle manufacturer, and an information terminal possessed by a user, which can make two-way communications via a communication line, wherein

said information providing apparatus comprises:

10 information acquisition function for accessing a storage device and acquiring information associated with progress status of a plurality of vehicles before shipping, which information is stored in the storage device; and

15 information providing function for, via said information acquisition function to refer to the storage device by using an identification information as a key, acquiring information associated with progress status of a specific vehicle corresponding to the identification information, the identification  
20 information which is acquired from an information terminal that is connected via a communication line to allow two-way communications and specifies a user of the information terminal or a vehicle, and for providing the acquired information to the information  
25 terminal from which the identification information was output, and

said information terminal comprises:



information informing function for acquiring  
information associated with progress status of the  
specific vehicle from said information providing  
apparatus in response to output of the identification  
5 information to said information providing apparatus,  
and informing the user of the acquired information.

25. A vehicle information providing method which uses  
an information providing apparatus that belongs to a  
vehicle manufacturer, and an information terminal  
10 possessed by a user, which can make two-way  
communications via a communication line, comprising:

a communication access step of setting a two-way  
communication state by outputting identification  
information, which specifies a user of the information  
15 terminal or a vehicle from the information terminal to  
said information providing apparatus via the  
communication line;

an information providing step of acquiring  
information associated with progress status of a  
20 specific vehicle corresponding to the identification  
information received in the communication access step  
from the information associated with a plurality of  
vehicles before shipping, which information is stored  
in a storage function, in accordance with the  
25 identification information, and providing the acquired  
information to the information terminal from which the  
identification information was output, and

an information informing step of acquiring the information associated with progress status of the specific vehicle from said information providing apparatus, and informing the user of the acquired information using the information terminal.

26. A computer program instructing a computer to operate as a vehicle information providing apparatus comprising:

information acquisition function for accessing a storage device and acquiring information associated with progress status of a plurality of vehicles before shipping, which information is stored in the storage device; and

information providing function for, via said information acquisition function to refer to the storage device by using an identification information as a key, acquiring information associated with progress status of a specific vehicle corresponding to the identification information, the identification information which is acquired from an information terminal that is connected via a communication line to allow two-way communications and specifies a user of the information terminal or a vehicle, and for providing the acquired information to the information terminal from which the identification information was output.

27. A computer program instructing a computer to implement a vehicle information providing method comprising:

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5 a communication access step of setting a two-way communication state by outputting an identification information, which specifies a user of an information terminal or a vehicle from the information terminal possessed by the user to an information providing apparatus that belongs to a vehicle manufacturer, which  
10 can make two-way communications via a communication line;

an information providing step of acquiring information associated with progress status of a specific vehicle corresponding to the identification  
15 information received in the communication access step from the information associated with a plurality of vehicles before shipping, which information is stored in a storage function, in accordance with the identification information, and providing the acquired  
20 information to the information terminal from which the identification information was output, and

an information informing step of acquiring the information associated with progress status of the specific vehicle from said information providing  
25 apparatus, and informing the user of the acquired information using the information terminal.

28. A computer readable storage medium storing a program code for making a computer operate as a vehicle information providing apparatus comprising:

5 information acquisition function for accessing a storage device and acquiring information associated with progress status of a plurality of vehicles before shipping, which information is stored in the storage device; and

10 information providing function for, via said information acquisition function to refer to the storage device by using an identification information as a key, acquiring information associated with progress status of a specific vehicle corresponding to the identification information, the identification  
15 information which is acquired from an information terminal that is connected via a communication line to allow two-way communications and specifies a user of the information terminal or a vehicle, and for providing the acquired information to the information  
20 terminal from which the identification information was output.